

GAMES

FAQ

Q Do I need a dual-core processor to play the latest games?

A Both ATI and Nvidia's drivers can use dual-core processors. This means they can use the second core, leaving the first free for the game itself to run AI, physics and audio tasks. In practice, you won't see big increases in performance as the processor is rarely the bottleneck on modern 3D games. However, slower dual-core notebook processors may benefit slightly.

Some newer titles, such as real-time strategy title Supreme Commander (see Top 5 games), can put a massive strain on your processor. This is due to its huge battlefields populated by massive opposing armies. Fortunately, this game supports dual-core processors, and in testing we found it ran more smoothly with one.

In future more games are certain to use the full power of dual-core processors, with improved AI and bigger game worlds being possible improvements. We'd definitely recommend getting a dual-core processor in your next gaming PC. However, if you play only first-person shooters, there's no rush to upgrade just yet.

Seth Barton

Notebooks, video and games expert

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EIDOS INTERACTIVE Battlestations: Midway

★★★★★

£18 inc VAT



Battlestations: Midway is a WWII combat game that re-creates the Pacific war between the US and the Japanese. The campaign starts with you playing a naval officer in Pearl Harbour, stationed aboard a patrol boat. You have to escape with your life as the port explodes around you, and destroy a few enemy planes and submarines in the process. The game is forgiving in how much it expects you to do; for example, while you're concentrating on steering the boat and dropping depth charges, your crew will take charge of the anti-aircraft guns.

As soon as you're used to handling the patrol boat, the game throws you behind the flight stick of a fighter plane to dogfight with the Japanese squadrons. Eventually, you'll command a wide range of vehicles including destroyers, aircraft carriers and even submarines, with each vehicle requiring a different set of skills.

When in command of a destroyer, you have to switch between control of the various weapons while assigning your crew to various tasks. Taking charge of an aircraft carrier is more complicated, as you'll have to assign the fighters and bombers their targets to attack and make sure they are re-supplied with munitions after each sortie. Submarines require you to adjust your depth to execute sneaky hit-and-run attacks without leaving yourself exposed.

Unfortunately, the bigger war machines feel a little lightweight, as if you're fighting a battle with toys rather than huge steel warships. The explosions and sound effects just don't look or feel meaty enough for our liking. However, the controls are well thought out and easy to master. We found the game

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good mix of action and strategy
- ✓ Take instant charge of any friendly unit
- ✗ Ship combat isn't realistic

NAVAL SIMULATION Requires Windows XP or Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B00076XCCU
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS www.battlestations.net



▲ Can you rise to the challenge of controlling an aircraft carrier in Battlestations: Midway?

was best played using a console-style joypad with two analogue sticks.

As you progress through the campaign, you're given control of multiple units. In one of the more strategy-heavy missions, you have to organise the defence of an entire island. At the touch of a button, you can instantly switch between any of the units under your command. This means you have only yourself to blame should a critical attack fail to succeed. Strategy is more important to winning a battle than arcade skills, however, and you can confidently leave units to carry out your orders.

Battlestations: Midway works well as a multiplayer game. The battles are team-based, and you can play as Japanese or US forces. There can be eight players in total, with each team sharing the responsibility of commanding their fleet.

The graphics are very pleasing, even if they aren't exactly ground breaking, and the game runs smoothly on modest hardware. The campaign mode is rather short, although there are extra standalone missions to complete, too. The game strikes a good balance between action and strategy, and it is a lot of fun in the process.

Chris Finnamore

Top 5 games

1. Supreme Commander

£25 inc VAT ★★★★★



This RTS has the biggest battles ever seen on a PC. There's a vast range of units to command and the graphics are slick, but you'll need a powerful PC to run it smoothly.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.supremecommander.com FULL REVIEW Apr 2007



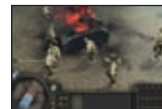
2. Company of Heroes

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.thq.com FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



3. FIFA 2007

£25 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS <http://fifa07.ea.com> FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



4. FlatOut 2

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



FlatOut 2 has the most outrageous crashes in it that let you send your driver through the windscreen and into the road. It's also a brilliant racing game.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.flatoutgame.com FULL REVIEW Oct 2006



5. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

£13 inc VAT ★★★★★



The most stunning role-playing game we've ever played. Graphics are amazing, and there's so much to it you could play it for a month and still have loads left to do.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.com DETAILS www.elderscrolls.com FULL REVIEW Jul 2006





▲ In Europa Universalis III, becoming the master of your own empire is just the beginning

PARADOX
INTERACTIVE
Europa Universalis III
★★★★★
£18 inc VAT



Europa Universalis III (EU3) is undoubtedly a very serious game. It's hugely complex, aloof and largely unbothered about looking good. So it's baffling that it requires a fast 3D card to create its very plain appearance.

The game lets you play as any nation from 15th-century Europe, but it doesn't demand that you do anything so predictable as conquer the world. You could try it, but what's key here is setting your own goals. You could be a military leader or an economic one; possibly a progressive monarch racing to discover the New World first, or a tyrant who's more concerned with bickering over contested borders.

It's an amazingly flexible game, although you'll have to master the often confusing interface before embarking on self-devised goals. It's a game made first and foremost for an established audience, and that means newcomers may struggle to understand how it all works. There's a minimum of in-game help, and much of your time is spent in menus filled with cold numbers.

Struggle onwards, though, and there's a real satisfaction to be had from understanding it all, and from knowing the goals you achieve are very much your own. It's not quite historically accurate – the starting world is a meticulous re-creation of the kingdoms and empires of the era, which are divided into a whopping 1,700 provinces – but as soon as you start playing, all bets are off and anything is possible.

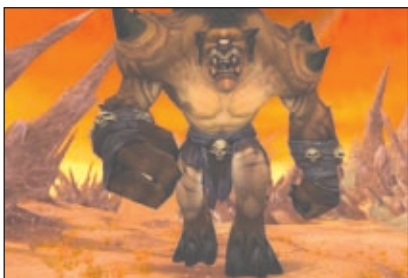
Be warned, though; this is an enormous game. Playing through to the final year, 1789, takes a long time. Managing the huge amount of stuff in your extended empire – presuming you've decided to expand it – can become exhausting. However, if you stick with it that long, you'll be well schooled in the intricacies of EU3, and more able to appreciate it for the thoughtful and challenging beast that it is.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ Amazingly flexible
- ✓ Genuinely rewarding to master
- ✗ Looks poor yet requires a high-spec PC

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.9GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, 1GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000KCIB2M
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS www.europauniversalis3.com



▲ You'll fight some angry-looking opponents in The Burning Crusade for treasure and power

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
World of Warcraft:
The Burning
Crusade
★★★★★
£30 inc VAT

You've probably heard of World of Warcraft. It's the most popular online role-playing game with millions of addicts worldwide. You choose to be a dwarf, elf, orc and so on, and venture out into an enormous world where you battle other players or computer-controlled opponents for treasure and power. The graphic design is cartoon-like, but the game is serious, massive and stuffed with things to do as well as fight, including fishing, weaving and dancing.

The Burning Crusade is the first expansion pack for World of Warcraft. It adds two new races: the good but demonic-looking Draenei and the beautiful but evil Blood Elves. Each race has a new island to explore before venturing into the wider world. It allows players to get more powerful by raising the game's maximum level, plus there's a new realm called Outland packed with fresh enemies. This broken and ruined region requires you to use new flying steeds, which include Gryphons and Wyverns, to get to its maximum-level dungeons.

World of Warcraft can be an expensive habit. On top of £20 for the original game and £30 for the expansion pack, you must pay a £9-per-month subscription. However, you have to buy the expansion pack only if you want to use the new races or play at the highest levels. If you're new, the original game should suffice.

The in-game community, especially in the UK, is not as friendly as you'd hope until you get to higher levels, making this a solo game for much of the time. Many quests are repetitive, and the weeks it takes to get up to speed can be tedious. There's little instant gratification.

If you've not played World of Warcraft and want to, this is an excellent time to get involved as the expansion has given the game a new lease of life. Just be aware that you're undertaking a huge commitment.

Evan Knowles

SUMMARY

- ✓ New races and areas to explore
- ✓ Flying mounts
- ✗ An expensive habit

ROLE-PLAYING GAME Requires Windows 2000/XP or Mac OS X, 800MHz processor, 512MB RAM, 8GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000ENRFLK
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.worldofwarcraft.com



▲ Test your ability to hit the bullseye with PDC World Championship Darts

OXYGEN
INTERACTIVE
PDC World
Championship Darts
★★★
£22 inc VAT

Darts has been making a TV comeback recently, with Sky Sports showing the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) games. Oxygen Interactive decided the time was right for a game based on that league. The game features all the actual players and their animated versions look true to their real-life appearances, though a bit more facial animation would have been nice.

The problem with re-creating darts as a computer game is the repetitive nature of the sport. You throw darts at the board to score points and then finish the leg with a double. The board is always the same, the darts are always the same and the distance is always the same. In motor sport, you get different tracks and cars, while golf has different courses and weather conditions. Here it doesn't matter which player you select or whether you play in Essex, Holland or Vegas: it's the same game.

The control system for throwing darts sees you pulling back the mouse to set power and pushing it forward to release. Any deviation from a straight line will cause the dart to miss your intended target. Despite considerable practice, we found it hard to be consistent.

There is a range of game modes, including quick play, tournament and career, but they all boil down to a series of games against either the computer, which is annoyingly good, or an unfortunate friend. The presentation is respectable, however, with the graphics and commentary doing a decent job of recreating the atmosphere of televised darts.

A variety of party games is available for multiple players, and these can all be played with an assortment of wacky control systems. However, it's not enough to save this game, which was doomed from the start by its subject matter. Our advice is to buy a real dartboard and get some friends round to play on that.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Television-style presentation
- ✗ Poor control system
- ✗ A real dartboard is cheaper

SPORTS GAME Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000GHVWJA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.oxygenint.com